



COUNTY OF ORANGE HEALTH CARE AGENCY

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

JULIETTE A. POULSON, RN, MN
Director

MARK B. HORTON, MD, MSPH
Deputy Agency Director/Health Officer

MAILING ADDRESS:
405 W 5th STREET, 7th Floor
SANTA ANA, CA 92701

TELEPHONE: (714) 834-3155

FAX: (714) 834-5506

E-MAIL: mhorton@hca.co.orange.ca.us

December 9, 2003

TO: HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

FROM: Mark Horton, MD, MSPH, County Health Officer

SUBJECT: **CURRENT INFLUENZA OUTBREAK**

Influenza activity nationally and in California is increasing rapidly and unusually early this year.

In the winter of 1997-98 a similar epidemic caused severe stress on the healthcare system, due in part to the nursing shortage (which is ongoing), a decrease in hospital bed capacity, particularly intensive care, and over-utilization of emergency departments. The peak activity occurred at the beginning of the winter holiday season, which further contributed to personnel shortages. The current outbreak may be even more severe. Up-to-date summaries of influenza activity are available at

<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/dcdc/VRDL/html/FLU/Fluintro.htm>

Most of the influenza strains detected in the U.S. this season are a genetic variant of the strain present in the current influenza vaccine. This means that the current vaccine will provide cross- protection, decreasing the severity of illness, if not completely preventing infection; so, vaccination is worthwhile.

We urge all health care providers to take measures that can lessen the impact of an influenza outbreak on your patient population.

- Prioritize remaining vaccine to vaccinate health care staff and individuals at high risk of complications*;
- Use any encounter as an opportunity to vaccinate, including emergency department and urgent care visits and acute care hospitalizations;
- Order additional influenza vaccine from your distributor, if available. Supplies are running short and public health inventories are now very limited.
- Expand hours or dedicate blocks of clinic time to accommodate patients with influenza-like illness in your primary care or urgent care clinics. Emergency Departments rapidly become overburdened;
- Prescribe antiviral agents for *prophylaxis* of high-risk household contacts of confirmed influenza cases;
- Institute a respiratory hygiene program in your office or clinic:
 - At entry, triage or registration, ask all patients with symptoms of respiratory illness to wear a surgical mask, including instructions on proper use and disposal;
 - Provide tissues with instructions to cover the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and a small paper or plastic bag for mask and tissue disposal;

- Encourage and provide access to hand washing or a waterless hand hygiene product; instruct patients to decontaminate their hands after handling respiratory secretions and before their contact with a healthcare worker.

Thank you for your assistance in this important matter.

* Persons at high risk of complications from influenza include those ages ≥ 50 years and 6-23 months, pregnant women in their second or third trimester, residents of long term care facilities, children and teenagers receiving long-term aspirin therapy, and persons > 6 months with history of immunosuppression or a chronic medical condition such as diabetes, asthma, blood disorder or chronic metabolic, pulmonary, cardiac or renal disease.